



## **Directions for Holding a Performance of “Bound for Freedom: the Case of Polly Strong” in the Classroom**

Feel free to modify these directions to meet the needs of your classroom. For example, parts can be combined or divided depending on how many students participate.

### **Relevant Indiana State Social Studies Standards\***

#### *Standard 1 History*

- United States History 1787-1850 (Constitution, Federal Republic)
- Indiana History (Territorial and Statehood Development)
- Chronological Thinking and Analysis (use timelines, use historical documents)
- Research Capabilities

#### *Standard 2 Civics and Government* (Foundations and Function of Government and Roles of Citizens)

- Structure of the Indiana judicial branch
- The Indiana Constitution
- The United States Constitution
- The Bill of Rights (especially 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment and 5<sup>th</sup> Amendment)
- The U.S. Supreme Court

#### *Standard 3 Geography*

- Identify key rivers, cities, etc.

#### *Standard 4 Economics*

- Changing value of money
- Changing nature of goods and services

#### *Standard 5 Individuals, Society, and Culture*

- Changing societal ideas about the rights of individuals

This material was prepared by Dr. Elizabeth R. Osborn, Special Assistant to the Chief Justice for Court History and Public Education. If you have any questions about this material or any other programs in the “Courts in the Classroom” project, feel free to contact Dr. Osborn at (317) 233-8682 or by e-mail at [eosborn@courts.state.in.us](mailto:eosborn@courts.state.in.us). For more information visit the “Courts in the Classroom” web site located at [www.in.gov/judiciary/citc](http://www.in.gov/judiciary/citc).

## **Related Indiana State Standards**

Activities related to the case of **Lasselle v. State** can easily be expanded to encompass standards from multiple subject areas other than social studies. A few examples are provided below.

### **Math:**

#### *Standard 7 Problem Solving*

- How far is it from Indianapolis, Indiana (location of current Indiana capitol) to Corydon, Indiana (location of Indiana Supreme Court in Polly's time)?
- How long would it have taken Polly to get to Indianapolis if she was traveling on a train going approximately 35 miles per hour?
- How long would it have taken Polly to get to Indianapolis if she was traveling by horseback covering about 50 miles per day?
- How long would it take Polly to get to Indianapolis if she was traveling today on a commercial airplane going approximately 400 miles per hour?
- In 1819 the Knox County Sheriff charged the court .60 for serving papers to witnesses involved in the case. How much is .60 in today's dollars? How much does the Sheriff's department charge to serve papers today?

### **English/Language Arts:**

#### *Standard 4 and 5 Writing: Process and Application*

- Have students respond to the trial court's decision to uphold Lasselle's claims to owning Polly. Have them explain their answer.
- Ask students to provide their own verdict in the case.

#### *Standard 6 Listening and Speaking: Skills, Strategies, and Application*

- Have students act out scenes from Lasselle v. State.
- Have students write their own scenes. For example, have Polly's brother and mother explain their position.
- Have students, as if they were Polly's lawyers, write to the Governor explaining Polly's plight (this would be before the trial court ruling was overturned by the Indiana Supreme Court).

## **Lasselle v. State: Case Summary**

Hyacinthe Lasselle was a prominent resident of Vincennes, Indiana. Prior to Indiana's statehood, and even before Virginia had ceded lands northwest of the Ohio River to the federal government, Lasselle's uncle purchased slaves from Native Americans. In 1820, two antislavery advocates brought a lawsuit in the Circuit Court of Knox County on behalf of Polly Strong, the daughter of one of Lasselle's slaves and a slave herself. The advocates argued that slavery was

invalid in light of the new 1816 state constitution and, despite an unfavorable ruling by the Circuit Court, the Indiana Supreme Court ultimately granted Polly her freedom.

### **Timeline of *Lasselle v. State*** (and related events)

c. 1796: Polly Strong is born to Jenny, a slave. (Later baptismal records list her father as “one named Strong.”)

1804: Hyacinthe Lasselle moves permanently to Vincennes and becomes a prominent resident of the city.

1806: Hyacinthe Lasselle purchases Polly.

Before 1816: John Johnson, Judge of the General Court of the Indiana Territory, concludes that the children of Jenny are slaves.

June 1816: Indiana’s first constitution is written in Corydon, Indiana. Following the requirements of the Northwest Ordinance, this constitution prohibits slavery and involuntary servitude.

December 11, 1816: Indiana is admitted to the Union.

June 15-16, 1818: In reference to a freedom suit, a writ of *habeas corpus* requires that Hyacinthe Lasselle present both Polly and her brother, James, to the Knox County Circuit Court. Lasselle asks that the case be dismissed.

c. May 1820: Knox County Circuit Court Judge Jonathan Doty rules in Lasselle’s favor. As a result, Polly remains Lasselle’s property.

July 22, 1820: The Indiana Supreme Court reverses the judgment of the Knox County Circuit Court. Polly Strong is declared a free woman.

### **Vocabulary**

**INDIANA SUPREME COURT:** Indiana’s highest court. A person who loses a lawsuit in one of Indiana’s lower courts can appeal to the Supreme Court.

**NORTHWEST TERRITORY:** Lands north and west of the Ohio River that were ceded to the federal government by various states during the late 18th century. The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 governed the Northwest Territory, which ultimately was divided into six states: Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota.

**INDIANA CONSTITUTION OF 1816:** A requirement for statehood, Indiana’s first constitution outlawed slavery.

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**SLAVERY:** A condition in which one person is under the control of another, often for the purpose of forced labor. Slavery was one of the primary causes of the Civil War.

**VINCENNES:** Capitol of the Indiana Territory prior to statehood. Polly was born in Vincennes in approximately 1796.

**APPEAL:** To have a higher court review the ruling of a lower court. You only do this if you are not satisfied with the decision from the lower court.

## **Key Figures in the Play**

**POLLY STRONG:** Person who brought a lawsuit against her owner so that a court might declare her freedom. Polly's case is the central story of the play. Although the Indiana Supreme Court granted Polly her freedom, little is known about her life following these events.

**HYACINTHE LASSELLE:** General Hyacinthe Lasselle was one of Vincennes' most prominent citizens. He commanded Fort Harrison for a time during the War of 1812, owned Vincennes' largest hotel, married the daughter of a well-connected French family, and raised a family of ten children.

**JUDGE ISAAC BLACKFORD:** A well-known opponent of slavery, Judge Blackford served on the Indiana Supreme Court for 35 years – longer than any other person.

**JUDGE JESSE HOLMAN:** A former Kentucky slave owner, Judge Holman freed his slave when he moved to the Indiana Territory. Judge Holman served on the Indiana Supreme Court from 1816 to 1830 and was instrumental in founding both Indiana University and Franklin College.

**JUDGE JAMES SCOTT:** Like Judge Holman, Judge Scott served on the Indiana Supreme Court from 1816 to 1830. Judge Scott was also a member of the convention that drafted Indiana's first Constitution in 1816.

## **Actor Roles and Props Needed for the Play**

### *Historical Figures--Speaking Parts*

- Polly Strong (it is recommended that an adult play this role)
- Bailiff (put blazer on)
- Judge Scott (put on robes)
- Judge Holman (put on robes)
- Judge Blackford (put on robes)
- Hyacinthe Lasselle (Polly's owner—wear dress pants and shirt?)
- Mr. Kinney (Polly's lawyer-- wear dress pants and shirt?)

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*Historical Figures* (no speaking—hold signs)

- Jenny (Polly's mom—wear bonnet and apron)
- James (Polly's brother—wear button up shirt and kerchief)
- Mr. Kinney (Polly's lawyer—hold sign and point to student portraying Kinney)
- Hyacinthe Lasselle (Polly's owner- hold sign and point to student portraying Lasselle)

*Location Cards* (no speaking, walk in front of group holding up card with location)

- Corydon, Indiana, July 1820
- Indiana Supreme Court courtroom
- Vincennes, Indiana

*Maps* (no speaking, walk/stand in front of group holding map or place post-it as directed)

- Northwest Territory
- Historic Indiana and Kentucky
  - Place post-it on map locating Corydon
  - Place post-it on map locating Vincennes
  - Place post-it on map locating Fort Wayne
  - Place post-it on map indicating Kentucky

*Picture Cards* (no speaking, walk in front of group holding up picture)

- Corydon, Capitol building (used twice)
- Vincennes, Capitol building

*Definition Cards* (stand and read definition from card)

- Indiana Supreme Court
- Northwest Territory
- Territorial Capitol of Vincennes

*Biography Cards* (not the characters, just stand and read the biographical description)

- Judge Scott
- Judge Holman
- Judge Blackford

*Prompted Audience Responses* (read as a group, 3-5 per group--anyone in audience can join in!)

- "1816" (Indiana's first constitution was written in 1816)
- "Because the 1816 constitution says so!" (Why no slavery in Indiana)
- "We the People, of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union" [they stop and next group shouts out} (do you know some words of the Constitution from memory?)
- "Freedom of religion"
- "Freedom of speech"
- "Freedom of the press"

## **Description of Actor Roles and Props Needed for the Play**

*Character Parts:* Students will play the roles of Hyacinthe Lasselle, the bailiff, and the judges. Because Polly's role has many speaking lines, an adult should play her part. Among the student roles, Judge Holman's is the longest.

*Historical Figures:* Students will be provided with costumes (for example, a hat, bow tie, briefcase, etc.). When the actress playing Polly Strong points to a figure, the student stands up, displays the card, and smiles, frowns, waves, or performs some other action as the script indicates. No speaking is required.

*Scene cards, maps, pictures:* The student simply holds up the prop at the specified time and slowly walks across the front of the room so the audience see the prop clearly. No reading or speaking is required.

*Definitions, Biography Cards:* At the appropriate time the student stands up and, with a clear, audible, voice, reads information from a card. Most roles require that the student read only a couple of sentences.

*Responses:* At the appropriate time student stands up and, with a clear, audible voice, responds to the question asked by the actress. The answer is provided on a card. These roles typically require the student to read one sentence.

*For Students with no Role in the Play:* Give these students a 3x5 card and tell them to write down one question for the discussion portion of the play. For example, they might want to ask about what Polly might have decided to do with her newly won freedom.

## **Follow-up Questions**

The opinion for this case, a timeline surrounding the lives of both Polly and Lasselle, and other teaching materials can be found at <http://www.in.gov/judiciary/citc/special/bound-for-freedom/>.

1. The Indians sold Polly's mother to a French trader. What Indians lived in Indiana in the late 1700s? In what kind of houses did they live? Did they have slaves?
2. Why do you think the Circuit Court refused to grant Polly her freedom? Why do you think the Supreme Court granted Polly her freedom?
3. When the Supreme Court granted Polly her freedom, do you think it had any affect on other slaves living in Indiana? If so, how? If not, why not?
4. Discuss the possible attitudes about slavery that citizens of Indiana held at this time (including the attitudes of the Supreme Court Judges who decided Polly's case). Explain why a state's laws and the opinions of those living there can differ.

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5. Using the court records and timeline found at the above web site, discuss how difficult it can be to find information for someone who is both a woman and an African-American. Explain that women, like African-Americans, were not considered full citizens and in legal matters were dependent on their male relatives (father, husband, or son).
6. Have your students re-enact the events surrounding Polly's court case using the materials provided at the web site above. Students can also watch the video, "Bound for Freedom."